



Coconino County Sheriff's Office

Bill Pribil, Sheriff

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release
Date: January 21, 2010

Contact: Gerry Blair (928) 226-5089

Avalanche Potential Advisory

Flagstaff. AZ- As this severe winter storm continues the Coconino County Sheriff's Office and the Coconino National Forest are extending the warning to backcountry mountain travelers to be alert for potential avalanche hazards on the San Francisco Peaks. Due to the predicted heavy snowfall dangerous avalanche conditions may exist and may remain potentially hazardous for long periods. Snow depths are as much as 60" and individuals have already reported witnessing some natural avalanche activity. It is important for backcountry travelers to be aware that no avalanche control is conducted in the backcountry outside of the Arizona Snowbowl Ski Area boundary. At this point the majority of dirt roads in the northern portion of Coconino County are snow packed and impassable to vehicles. The avalanche potential in the higher backcountry is very real and presents an unacceptable hazard to anyone who may travel in the area and will remain a hazard for at least a week. The Coconino County Sheriff's Office Strongly advises against backcountry travel given the current circumstances.

People venturing into mountainous terrain should carry avalanche rescue equipment such as a shovel, avalanche rescue beacon, avalanche probe, and winter survival gear. Be prepared for travel and emergencies in the remote winter mountain environment where rescue is not immediate. Do not travel alone and leave a detailed trip plan with a responsible person. Your best chance for survival in an avalanche is companion rescue. It is important to review recent weather reports and forecasts as well as driving conditions prior to and during your trip. Carrying a cell phone is recommended; however, it may not always work in backcountry locations and should not substitute for good judgment and preparation. It is recommended that people who use the mountain backcountry receive formal avalanche safety education and winter survival skills. Free avalanche awareness clinics are offered by the Kachina Peaks Avalanche Center. More information about these clinics can be found at www.kachinapeaks.org.

Winter backcountry travel into the Kachina Peaks Wilderness Area from Arizona Snowbowl requires a free annual backcountry permit. This includes the parking areas at FR 522 and Lamar Haines Wildlife Area. Backcountry permits are available in Flagstaff at the Peaks Ranger Station, 5075 N. Highway 89, and the Coconino National Forest Supervisor's Office, 1824 S Thompson St. Permits will also be available at Arizona Snowbowl's Agassiz Lodge weekend mornings once the ski area reopens.

###